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Preposterous Emissaries

Billy Carter has been involved with Libya since September 1978. Libya is no ordinary country, but a bank-roller of international terrorism, a friend of Idi Amin, and an incorrigible enemy of US allies. Yet it was not until July 22, 1980, that President Carter could bring himself to rebuke his brother publicly for involvement with the Qaddafi regime. The president's statement was lame as well as tardy. It said merely: "I do not believe it is appropriate for a close relative of the president to undertake any assignment on behalf of a foreign government." Not appropriate? Billy Carter's connection with Libya was obscene, and the president should have squelched it at its inception. Presidents are not their brothers' keepers, but they are responsible for protecting the national interest. The minute President Carter learned that Billy was planning to visit Libya, the president should have seen that no good would come of it, and should have acted to reroute US business with Libya through legitimate diplomatic channels.

By scotching the courtship between Billy and Libya at the outset, the president would have served his own interest, Billy's, and the nation's. That he didn't do this bespeaks deplorable judgment, at the very least. If the president now is in political trouble over this affair, he richly deserves it.

Whatever possessed the administration—not just the president, but National Security Adviser Brzezinski—to think that the president's brother, a beer-swilling Georgia gas station owner, could serve as a useful diplomatic intermediary? The administration did treat him as such, by giving him and his cronies high-level National Security Council briefings before his trips, and asking him to arrange an official meeting with Libya's chargé d'affaires in Washington. But, then, whatever possessed the administration to think that Muhammad Ali could persuade African nations to boycott the Olympics, or that Chip Carter would impress foreign countries as part of a US delegation? These were not ambassadors extraordinaire in the tradition of Robert Murphy or Averell Harriman. If the world thinks that the United States has ceased to be a serious world power, the Carter administration's choice of special emissaries is added evidence of the fact.

The White House claims it did not know until this year that Billy Carter was getting money as a result of his Libyan connections. We find this hard to accept. Even without hard information, Brzezinski and the president should have been fully aware that the Libyans would not court Billy Carter for mere "friendship." They should have foreseen the possibility that Libya would use Billy, either to buy influence or to set up the administration for an embarrassment. That is the way Libya operates. It is not merely a radical and fanatic regime, but a criminal one, which uses its oil riches to pay for assassination and to spread subversion. We find it impossible to believe that the CIA and FBI have not been keeping close watch on Libyan financial transactions in the United States, and that they have not been informing the White House. If they did not, then those agencies are in a very bad way indeed, and thorough house-cleanings may be in order.

The New Republic, which does not have a far-flung network of trained intelligence operatives, had information as early as January 1979 that Billy Carter was on the take from Libya. This journal reported (see "More Adventures of Billy Carter," *TNR*, February 10, 1979) that on a return flight from Libya the previous September, a boozy Billy showed fellow passengers an elaborate bracelet made, he said, of 18-carat gold. This was a gift from the Libyan government, he said, and he claimed to have four more like it in his suitcase. He claimed that one of his fellow visitors to Libya had received a solid gold brick. When he finally signed a consent decree last month agreeing to register as a foreign agent, Billy admitted having received four bracelets, along with a \$220,000 "loan." Billy Carter did not report receipt of the bracelets when he went through customs (he was waved right through the reporting station in Boston, signing autographs as he went). This apparent violation of law still has not been investigated by the Justice Department. If we knew that Billy had begun receiving remuneration for services anticipated on Libya's behalf, why didn't the White House know?

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